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Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0197
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, EI
SUBJECT: FIANNA FAIL ANNUAL CONVENTION

1. SUMMARY: THE ANNUAL CONVENTION (ARD FHEIS) OF IRELAND'S MAJORITY AND GOVERNING PARTY, FIANNA FAIL, WAS A MASSIVE, JUBILANT GATHERING OF THE FAITHFUL. NO NEW INITIATIVES WERE LAUNCHED - THE GOVERNMENT HAD EMBARKED ON A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ALREADY, AND THE ARD FHEIS MERELY ENDORSED AND CHEERED ON THE EFFORTS. PARTY LEADER/PRIME MINISTER JACK LYNCH WAS THE UNALLOYED STAR, AND THE CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED CONVENTION GAVE EQUAL TIME BUT NOT MUCH STAR BILLING TO OTHER PARTY LEADERS. QUITE A FEW UP-COUNTRY DELEGATES HAD THEIR TIME IN THE SUN, AND IN GENERAL IT WAS A CONGENIAL BUT NOT VERY EXCITING CONVENTION -- JUST AS PLANNED BY POWERFUL PARTY SECRETARY SEAMUS BRENNAN. IN HIS PRESENTIAL ADDRESS JACK LYNCH TALKED AT LENGTH ON NORTHERN IRELAND, REITERATING POSITIONS HE HAS TAKEN IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, THOUGH SEEMINGLY SOFTENING AND BLURRING THE HARSH EDGES. THE CONFERENCE AS A
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WHOLE WAS OVERSHADOWED BY THE APPALLING SLAUGHTER COMMITTED BY THE PROVOS ON FRIDAY NIGHT IN COUNTY DOWN. SOME ATTENTION WAS ALSO DIVERTED BY THE FIRST ATTEMPTED LARGE SCALE "PEACE"MARCH IN DUBLIN IN A LONG TIME, WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE UN-IMPRESSIVE (SEPTEL). END SUMMARY.

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2. OVER 7000 DELEGATES PACKED THE MAIN HALL OF DUBLIN'S ROYAL DUBLIN SOCIETY FOR THE 47TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE PARTY FOUNDED BY EAMON DE VALERA, FIANNA FAIL. IT WAS, OF COURSE, A VICTORY CELEBRATION TO MARK THE 20 SEAT ABSOLUTE MAJORITY GAINED IN THE 1977 ELECTION, AND A HERO-WORSHIP RITUAL FOR JACK LYNCH, THE UNASSUMING PARTY-LEADER WHO IS NOW RECOGNIZED AS THE MOSE SUCCESSFUL POLITICIAN IN IRISH HISTORY AFTER DE VALERA. THE PARTY IS, INDEED, RIDING HIGH. HOWEVER, THE RINGMASTER OF THE AFFAIR, GENERAL SECRETARY SEAMUS BRENNAN, WAS DETERMINED THAT IT WOULD BE MORE THAN A RITUAL, THAT THERE WOULD BE A THOROUGH GO-AROUND ON CURRENT PARTY-GOVERNMENT POLICY, AND THAT AT LEAST APPEARANCES WERE GIVEN THAT THE RANK-AND-FILERS ON A NUMBER OF HALFWAY CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS SUCH AS THE NUCLEAR POWER GENERATOR PROJECTED FOR WEXFORD. SOME MINISTERS HAD TO WORK QUUTE HARD TO GET FAVORABLE VOTES ON VARIOUS RESOLUTIONS. FISHERIES MINISTER BRIAN LENIHAN WAS PARTICULARLY UNDER THE GUN, BUT HE DID A GOOD JOB AND CAME OUT WITH HIGH MARKS -- HE HAS MORE SUPPORT IN FIANNA FAIL THAN AMONG THE FISHERMEN.

3. A RATHER FULL CONTINGENT OF BRITISH JOURNALISTS WERE ON HAND, HOPING THAT JACK LYNCH WOULD SAY SOMETHING CONTROVERSIAL ON NORTHERN IRELAND. INSOFAR AS WE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAN INTERPRET HIS LANGUAGE -- AND HALF OF A ONE HOUR SPEECH WAS DEVOTED TO THE PROBLEM -- THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT TO TONE DOWN CONTROVERSY AND CONFRONTATION WHILE STICKING TO THE MAIN POINTS OF FIANNA FAIL POLICY. HE STARTED BY MENTIONING HIS AMAZEMENT AT THE REACTION TO HIS JANUARY 8 INTERVIEW: "I DID NOT DEPART ONE IOTA FROM FIANNA FAIL POLICY AS IT HAD BEEN STATED AND IN OPERATION SINCE THE VERY FOUNDATION OF OUR PARTY OVER 50 YEARS AGO THAT REUNIFICATION CAN BE BROUGHT ABOUT ONLY BY PEACEFUL POLITICAL MEANS, THE FIRST PRIORITY BEING THAT THE MAJORITY AND MINORITY IN THE NORTH COME TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCOMODATE EACH OTHER AND LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE AND HARMONY ... WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE CLAMOR? WHATEVER THE REASON FOR THE SENSE OF OUTRAGE, REAL OR PROFESSED, IS IT NOT A PITY THAT PERSONS IN POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND INFLUENCE IN THE PRESS AND IN POLITICS SHOULD SO DISTORT THE SITUATION, AND TRY TO CAUSE DIVISION?..." LYNCH THEN PROCEEDED TO A STRONG DENOUNCEMENT OF THE PROVISIONAL IRA, INTERJECTING HIS HORROR AND DISGUST AT THE LATEST INCIDENT. HE ADDED THEN

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THAT "THE BORDER IS NOT A MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEM NOW,"

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0198
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
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NOTING THAT THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES HAD ESTIMATED ONLY 2 PERCENT OF THE VIOLENCE IN THE NORTH HAS ANY CONNECTION WITH THE SOUTH (COMMENT: A BRITISH DIPLOMAT LISTENING TO THE SPEECH COMMENTED AT THIS POINT THAT LYNCH'S FIGURES WERE OUT OF DATE AND THAT THE LATEST FIGURE IS CLOSER TO 15 PERCENT).

4. LYNCH GAVE A VERY SPECIFIC MESSAGE TO IRISH AMERICANS: "I WISH TO APPEAL AGAIN TO IRISH PEOPLE ABROAD, ESPECIALLY IN THE UNITED STATES WHO MIGHT NOT BE FULLY AWARE OF THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF IRISH PATRIOTISM AND WHO MIGHT BE INDUCED TO CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONS WHO PROVIDE THE RAW MATERIAL FOR THESE BOMBINGS AND KILLINGS. IF THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTE BELIEVE THAT THEIR MONEY GOES TO SUPPORT WODOWS AND ORPHANS LET ME MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IT GOES TO MAKE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS. THEY ARE NOT HELPING TOT FULFIL THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE IRISH PEOPLE BUT TO DESTROY THEM... SHORTLY AFTER WE CAME TO OFFICE LAST YEAR I WAS HAPPY TO WELCOME PRESIDENT CARTER'S INITIATIVE IN RELATION TO NORTHERN IRELAND. I WELCOME ALSO THE INITIATIVES
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TAKEN BY POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE UNITED STATES SUCH AS THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, TIP O'NEILL, THE GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK, HUGH CAREY, SENATORS TED KENNEDY AND PAT MOYNIHAN, AND THE MANY OTHER TRUE FRIENDS OF IRELAND IN AMERICAN POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LIFE. WE VALUE THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THIS COUNTRY AS A WHOLE AND IN ENCOURAGING IRISH AMERICANS TO DESIST FROM CONTRIBUTING TO DOUBTFUL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES - LIKE NORAID AND THE IRISH NATIONAL CAUCUS - WHOSE ACTIVITIES ARE ANATHEMA TO OUR PARTY AND OUR GOVERNMENT."

5. ON THE EMOTIVE ISSUE OF ASKING FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL LYNCH QUOTED A SPEECH HE HAD MADE IN 1971: "IT WOULD TAKE NOTHING FROM THE HONOR OF BRITAIN OR THE RIGHTS OF THE MAJORITY IN THE NORTH IF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WERE TO DECLARE THEIR INTEREST IN THE UNITY OF IRELAND BY AGREEMENT, IN INDEPENDENCE AND IN A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ISLANDS." HE POINTEDLY AVOIDED USING THE WORD "WITHDRAWAL", THOUGH SOME BRITISH JOURNALISTS REMARKED THAT THE WORD "UNITY" IS AT LEAST AS SENSITIVE, ESPECIALLY TO THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY. AT THE END OF HIS COMMENTS ON NORTHERN IRELAND LYNCH SAID THAT HE WOULD SET UP A "STUDY GROUP" TO REVIEW NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS IN ALL ASPECTS - CIVIL RIGHTS, FINANCIAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND "OTHER RELEVANT ARRANGEMENTS AS WELL AS A POSSIBLE FEDERAL ARRANGEMENT -- AND THIS IS NOTHING NEW."

6. THE REST OF LYNCH'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DEALT WITH THE EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO FULFILL ITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MANIFESTO IN VARIOUS AREAS, PARTICULARLY IN JOB-CREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

7. LYNCH'S CAREFULLY DRAFTED AND CHARACTERISTICALLY LOW-KEY ADDRESS WAS THE HIGH POINT OF THE ARD FHEIS, ELICITING THUNDERING APPLAUSE AND GENERAL ENTHUSIASM. SEVERAL SEASONED OBSERVERS NOTED THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ASSUMING PARTY LEADERSHIP HE DID NOT INVOKE THE PARTY GODS OF THE PAST, DE VALERA AND LEMASS, TO BUTTRESS POLICY POSITIONS AND MERELY ENUNCIATED HIS POLICY CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT JACK LYNCH IS THE UN-ASSAILABLE, STRONG LEADER OF THE PARTY AND COUNTRY. AS WE

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CIRCULATED IN THE BIG CROWD DURING THE WEEKEND THERE
WAS NOT A WHISPER OF CRITICISM OR DISAPPROVAL OF
JACK LYNCH.

8. IRISH PARTY CONVENTIONS TRADITIONALLY OFFER
OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CONTENDERS TO MAKE THEIR MARK,
AND THIS WAS NO EXCEPTION. THERE IS A PERENNIAL RUMOR
THAT JACK LYNCH WILL CHOOSE TO RETIRE AT THE APOGEE
OF HIS POWER, WHICH WE DOUBT, LEAVING THE WAY TO A
SUCCESSOR. FINANCE MINISTER GEORGE COLLEY, HEALTH
MINISTER HAUGHEY, AND PLANNING MINISTER O'DONOGHUE ALL
HAD THEIR INNINGS AT THE ARD FHEIS, AND WE ESTIMATE
THEIR EFFORTS AT A ROUGH STANDOFF. PERHAPS HAUGHEY
GAVE THE MOST BRAVURA PERFORMANCE, BUT THIS DID NOT
UP HIS BASIC POSITION. COLLEY STILL REMAINS THE
STRONGEST CONTENDER. DARK HORSE CONTENDER DES O'MALLEY,
MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, PROBABLY INCREASED
HIS FOLLOWING WITH A STRONG SPEECH IN WHICH HE
APPARENTLY COMMITTED THE GOVERNMENT TO GO AHEAD WITH
NUCLEAR ENERGY.

9. IN ASSESSING PERSONALITIES AND PROSPECTS, 29 YEAR
OLD PARTY SECRETARY SEAMUS BRENNAN STANDS OUT. BRENNAN,
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NEWLY APPOINTED SENATOR AND NOT YET TESTED IN ELECTORAL
POLITICS, RECEIVED NEW ACCOLADES AT THIS CONVENTION. HE
IS UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED AS THE ARCHITECT OF THE 1977

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

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SMASHING VICTORY FOR FIANNA FAIL, AND AS JACK LYNCH'S CHOSEN GOLDEN BOY. HIS STRONG CONTROL OF ORGANIZATION AT THIS CONVENTION WAS IMPRESSIVE.

10. THE CONFERENCE VOTED ON 133 RESOLUTIONS, WHICH HAD COME UP FROM THE VARIOUS BRANCHES (CUMAINN) AND WERE ARRANGED IN ORDER OF THE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES. ONLY THREE VOTES WENT IN OPPOSITION TO THE WISHES OF THE MINISTERS. FINANCE MINISTER COLLEY LOST THE VOTE ON A COUPLE OF ITEMS OF TAX POLICY, BUT WON A CLOSE VOTE ON AN EMOTIVE ISSUE OF TAXATION OF MARRIED WOMEN. VARIOUS WOMEN'S ISSUES ALSO WERE DEFEATED, REFLECTING THE GENERAL CONSERVATISM OF THE ASSEMBLED DELEGATES, BUT THE FEW WOMEN LEADERS IN THE PARTY GAVE A STRONG REBUTTAL AND PROMISE TO COME AGAIN. MRS. EILEEN LEMASS AND SILE DE VALERA (GRAND DAUGHTER OF EAMON) BOTH GAVE NOTABLE PERFORMANCES.

11. ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS THE CONVENTION HAD ONLY TO PASS VARIOUS INNOCUOUS RESOLUTIONS ON FURTHERING IRISH INTERESTS IN THE E.C. THE ONLY ISSUE WHICH
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SPARKED SOME INTEREST WAS A RESOLUTION ASKING FOR THE PARTY'S POSITION ON JOINING NATO. VARIOUS SPEAKERS SPEAKING ON THE FOREIGN AFFARIS RESOLUTIONS EXPRESSED STRONG FEELINGS AGAINST ANY POSSIBLE CONNECTION WITH NATO. FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY REPLIED THAT IRELAND HAS NO INTENTION OF JOINING NATO (SEE REFTEL). THIS ISSUE SEEMS TO HAVE TOUCHED A SENSITIVE NERVE IN THE FIANNA FAIL FAITHFUL, EXPECIALLY THE OLDER MEMBERS WHO WERE PERDOMINANT IN THE CONVENTION -- IT WOULD BE HERESY AGAINST THE OLD LEADER, DE VALERA, TO CONSIDER JOINING THE NATO ALLIANCE.

12. COMMENT: THE FIANNA FAIL ARD FHEIS (PRONOUNCED ARD-ESH) WAS MOSTLY A TRIUMPHAL PAEAN TO JACK LYNCH. FIANNA FAIL, A QUINTESSENTIAL IRISH PARTY, DOES NOT QUITE KNOW HOW TO LIVE WITH THE HEADY FEELING OF ITS SUDDEN OVERWHELMING POWER. THE MANIPULATOR O'DONOGHUE SKETCHES A GRAND PLAN, EUPHORIA IS STILL THE MOOD, BUT ECONOMIC FACTS WILL DECIDE THE FUTURE. THE PARTY'S ELECTION VICTORY AND ITS CREDIBILITY RESIDE

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WITH RATHER GRANDIOSE PROMISES -- TO, IN EFFECT,
SOLVE IRELAND'S UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION PROBLEMS,
AND THIS IN FAIRLY SHORT ORDER. EUPHORIA WILL
INEVITABLY FADE AS INTRACTABLE EXTERNAL ECONOMIC
FACTS PREVAIL, AND AT THAT POINT FIANNA FAIL WILL HAVE
TO START FINDING SCAPEGOATS. ... THE WHOLE ARD FHEIS
WAS CONDUCTED UNDER THE SHADOW OF A WORSENING
SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND, AND WORSENING ANGLO-
IRISH RELATIONS. JACK LYNCH'S REASSERTION OF FIANNA
FAIL POLICY REQUESTING BRITISH CONSIDERATION OF
MAKING A STATEMENT OF INTENTION TO WITHDRAW HAS BEEN
USED BY VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN THE NORTH SUCH AS THE UNIONISTS
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AND ROY MASON AS A CONVENIENT HANDLE FOR PUSHING
THEIR OWN POSITIONS. WE DETECTED IN LYNCH'S
APPROACH TO THE NORTH A CERTAIN AMBIVALENCE. HE
IS NOW COMMITTED TO REAFFIRMING BELIEF IN EVENTUAL
REUNIFICATION, BUT HE WANTS THIS POLICY TO BE SO
INTERPRETED THAT IT WILL NOT CAUSE A FUSS OR
COMPLICATE AFFAIRS IN THE NORTH. WE ALSO DETECTED
A CERTAIN PIQUE -- LYNCH APPARENTLY FEELS THAT
BOTH THE TORIES AND LABOR ARE DELIBERATELY
DISTORTING ANYTHING HE SAYS ON THE NORTH FOR "CERTAIN"
(READ ELECTORAL) ADVANTAGE. SHANNON

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